

Message Text

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FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 723

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1013

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM SCOTES

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: BEXP, ECON, SY

SUBJECT: DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR

REF: DAMASCUS 360

1. SUMMARY: THIS MORNING (JUNE 1) MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FOREIGN TRADE, MOHAMAD AL-IMADI, ASKED ME TO CALL AND IN COURSE OF CONVERSATION EXTENDED FORMAL INVITATION FOR UNITED STATES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 1974 DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR (JULY 25-AUGUST 20), BOTH WITH AN EXHIBIT AS WELL AS WITH A CULTURAL PRESENTATION. THIS CAN ONLY BE VIEWED AS A MAJOR BILATERAL MOVE ON THE PART OF THE SYRIANS, CERTAINLY WITH AT LEAST MINISTERIAL APPROVAL, SINCE INVITATIONS ARE EXTENDED ONLY TO THOSE COUNTRIES WITH WHOM SYRIA HAS FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. IN FACT, OUR INITIAL INQUIRIES ABOUT THE FAIR IN EARLY APRIL WERE POLITELY TURNED ASIDE WITH THE COMMENT THAT WE NEEDED AN OFFICIAL INVITATION. THEREFORE, I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT WE MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO PARTICIPATE THIS YEAR IN WHAT IS CONSIDERED BY MANY TO BE THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS FAIR IN THE ARAB WORLD. IT SERVES OUR OWN INTERESTS IN PROMOTING AMERICAN COMMERCE WHILE UNDERSCORING OUR RETURN
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TO SYRIA. MOREOVER, OUR PARTICIPATION SERVES AMERICAN-

SYRIAN BILATERAL INTERESTS IN THAT IT SUPPORTS AN IMPORTANT SYRIAN PROGRAM AND RESPONDS TO THIS OBVIOUS GESTURE ON THEIR PART FOR IMPROVED BILATERAL RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN EARLY APRIL WE EXPLORED THE POSSIBILITY OF PARTICIPATING IN THE DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR, THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL AND AGRICULTURAL FAIR IN THE ARAB WORLD. MANY COUNTRIES BOTH ARAB AND NON-ARAB PARTICIPATE IN THIS FAIR AND I BELIEVED IT WOULD BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO US TO PARTICIPATE THIS YEAR, AS WE HAD MANY TIMES IN THE PAST, TO UNDERSCORE THE AMERICAN RETURN TO DAMASCUS. IN THE COURSE OF OUR INITIAL DISCUSSIONS WE LEARNED THAT THE GOVERNMENT ISSUES OFFICIAL INVITATIONS ONLY TO THOSE COUNTRIES WITH WHOM IT HAS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. I SUBSEQUENTLY MADE A LOW-KEY APPROACH TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO SEE IF THEY WANTED US TO PARTICIPATE. THIS WAS WELL BEFORE YOUR VISIT AND I NEVER RECEIVED ANY REACTION TO MY QUERY. I CONCLUDED, THEREFORE, THAT IT WAS THEIR WAY OF SAYING IT WAS NOT POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE AT THAT TIME.

3. THIS ANNUAL FAIR IS WELL-KNOWN IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IS ATTENDED BY ARABS FROM ALL OVER THE ARAB WORLD, PARTICULARLY FROM THE GULF STATES. THIS YEAR 35 COUNTRIES WILL BE PARTICIPATING--WITH HEAVY REPRESENTATION FROM THE EASTERN BLOC. I BELIEVE IT HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AT ITS INITIATIVE HAS ASKED US TO PARTICIPATE OFFICIALLY. EVEN THOUGH SPACE IS LIMITED THE SYRIANS HAVE ALREADY VOLUNTEERED TO GIVE US EITHER 400 SQUARE METERS UNDER COVER OF AN OPEN AREA FOR US TO CONSTRUCT A PREFABRICATED PAVILION. THE MINISTER WAS FORCEFUL IN HIS EXPRESSIONS OF HOPE THAT WE WOULD PARTICIPATE AND SAID HE WOULD DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO FACILITATE OUR PARTICIPATION, INCLUDING CUSTOMS CLEARANCES, TRANSPORT, CONSTRUCTION, ETC.

4. THE MINISTER AND HIS AIDES EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE UNITED STATES COULD PARTICIPATE BOTH WITH COMMERCIAL EXHIBIT AS WELL AS A CULTURAL PRESENTATION. CONCERNING THE EXHIBIT, HE SAID IT COULD BE HANDLED IN TWO WAYS: A. A MIXTURE OF EXHIBITS BY INDIVIDUAL PRIVATE COMPANIES AS WELL AS AN

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OFFICIAL U.S. EXHIBIT UNDER THE SAME ROOF, OR B. A SOLELY U.S. GOVERNMENT EXHIBIT USING SOME THEME OF OUR OWN CHOOSING. CONCERNING THE CULTURAL PRESENTATION, HE NOTED THAT IN THE PAST WE HAD MADE AVAILABLE TO THE DAMASCUS FAIR SUCH CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS AS CINERAMA WHEN IT WAS FIRST DEVELOPED, HOLIDAY ON ICE AND THE HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS. HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WE COULD PROVIDE SOME SIMILAR PROGRAM THIS YEAR.

5. I HAVE NO DOUBT IN MY MIND HOW DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR US TO PARTICIPATE THIS YEAR. NO FUNDS HAVE BEEN BUDGETED; TIME IS VERY SHORT; LOGISTICS SEEM INSURMOUNTABLE. OUR AVAILABLE MANPOWER IS ALREADY STRETCHED TO ITS LIMIT. GIVEN ALL OF THESE DIFFICULTIES, HOWEVER, WE CAN STILL DO IT IF WE SO DECIDE AND I BELIEVE VERY STRONGLY WE SHOULD. WE ARE WILLING TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN FROM DAMASCUS TO MAKE THIS A SUCCESSFUL SHOW OF OUR RETURN TO SYRIA BUT THE DECISION FOR US TO PARTICIPATE THIS YEAR IS GOING TO NEED YOUR STRONG SUPPORT AND ENDORSEMENT. WE WILL BE FORWARDING SOONEST THE OTHER DETAILS WHICH THE DEPARTMENT AND COMMERCE WILL NEED IN THEIR PLANNING.
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